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ABSTRACT

Many writers have suggested that comprehension occurs at several levels (e.g., literal, inference, and conclusion). However, many teachers spend as much as two-thirds of their time on lower-level skills such as phonics and literal-level comprehension skills. Some authors have suggested ways of assisting readers in achieving comprehension at more than one level by such techniques as surveying and paragraph analysis. Several prominent educators have devised models of learning and thought, which have been translated into usable taxonomies for developing comprehension skills. (A chart is included that presents six of these models along with examples of how each is employed.) (TJ)

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Comprehension's the Name of the Game

Jack B. Jones

If phonics can be called a "means to an end", then comprehension is most probably that end. For in the final analysis, understanding fully what we have decided is paramount to the reading act.

Perfatti (1977) suggests three levels of comprehension for understanding sentence processing. Level I, the lowest, is characterized as a surface level featuring phonological and acoustical properties. Level II is classified as the most basic comprehension level which he terms the "semantic-syntactic level." Perfetti indicates that Level III is the interpretive level and involves comprehension of a sentence beyond that which is printed.

Strang (1969) in a similar vein, refers to three levels of comprehension as the literal level or "reading the lines"; the inference level or reading between the lines; and the conclusion level as "reading beyond the lines". Comprehension can be characterized then, as a higher level reading skill which is hierarchal in nature and important to understanding that which has been decoded.

Unfortunately, in the past many teachers have spent as much as two-thirds of their time on lower level skills such as phonics and literal level comprehension skills. If this is true, then it is time to emphasize comprehension especially at the higher levels.

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Basic comprehension skills:

Niles (1963) reports several basic comprehension skills. These include relating experiences, purpose and survey. Basic comprehension skills are prerequisite to higher level skills and are briefly discussed here for the purpose of developing a foundation on which level three skills are built.

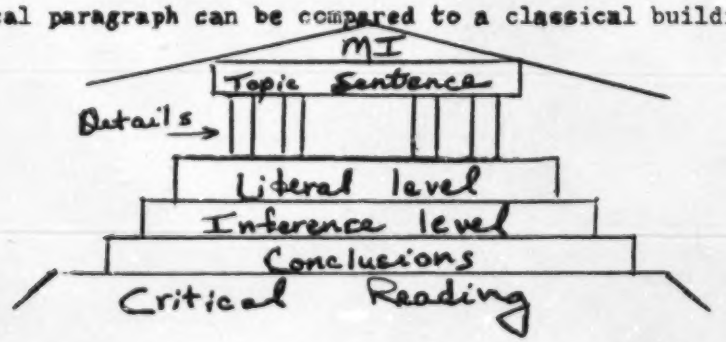
Niles believes that the survey is tantamont to reading success where comprehension is required. The reader employs the survey after relating previous relevant experiences (all that the reader knows about the subject) and sets his purposes for reading the material. The survey steps include reading title, and first paragraph very intensively followed by a careful reading of the first sentence of each subsequent paragraph. The concluding paragraph and any questions posed by the author are also read intensively and in their entirety. Setting purposes, relating experiences and executing the survey will provide at least fifty percent comprehension at level II.

Paragraph Analysis

Sparks and Johnson (1970) developed a comprehensive aid to assist readers in achieving an independence in understanding by employing paragraph analysis. Their activities include identification of the topic sentence, and developing a "power" hierarchy of supporting detail sentences which the reader can recognize.

A modification of this procedure is presented below and has been formed to be effective with readers of all ages.

The typical paragraph can be compared to a classical building.



Just as the roof covers the building so the Main Idea (MI) dericts the overall concept of the paragraph. The Main idea is usually reflected

in the topic sentence; the keystone of the building. Where as the columns support the keystone of the building, so do the supporting details support the topic sentence. From the details one can take the first step to literal level comprehension. The next step is predicated on the first and inferences can then be drawn followed by conclusions and then critical reading.

Explained through concrete examples, readers find paragraph analysis helpful in comprehending even the most difficult material.

Taxonomies of Comprehension

Several prominent educators have devised models of learning and or thought. Selecting the works of Guilford (1965), Bloom (1956), Guzak (1972), Strang (1969), Bruner (1971), and Piaget (1966), the author has attempted to translate their models, (with some modification) into a useable taxonomy for developing comprehension skills. The taxonomies have been used with typical materials for grade levels 3-12 and with all types of students. The matrix following, demonstrates the modified model of each author along with examples of how each is employed. The material on which this procedure is based, is a story about the transformation of plants to coal.

Before Man

Most people are aware that coal comes from dead plants. But how this transformation from plants to coal came about is less well known. This change began long ago when there were more trees and plants on earth than at any time before or since. There were numerous great trees and huge plants, many not now on earth, growing as high as 100 feet tall.

Then, considerably more of the surface of the earth was covered with water than at the present time. Much of this plant life grew in water and mud, one layer on top of the other. This dead material did not decay as it would have in the open air, but changed to peat. Then this land sank and became the bottom of lakes and oceans. After millions of years these peat beds were covered by deposits of mud and rock. The heat of the earth, the weight of the deposits, and other conditions changed this plant matter to coal. Thus long before there were any people on the earth, nature was making fuel which man would later use.

For Application of Different Taxonomies to Reading Comprehension see figure one.

GUILFORD SOI	BLOOM	GUZAK	STRANG	PIAGET	BRUNER
1. Cognition 2. Memory 3. Convergent Production 4. Divergent Production 5. Evaluation	1. Recall 2. Comprehension 3. Application 4. Analysis 5. Synthesis 6. Evaluation	1. Locating 2. Remembering 3. Organizing 4. Predicting/ Extending 5. Evaluation	1. Literal 2. Inferences 3. Conclusions	1. Concrete 2. Symbolic 3. Abstract	1. Remembering Experience 2. Problem Solving 3. Independent Investigation
1. Write the definition of Vegetation. 2. What comes from dead vegetation? 3. Cloze Passages. 4. Design your own dinosaur. 5. What would you do if you had to try and make coal?	1. What comes from dead vegetation? 2. Illustrate through a time-line the transformation of plants to coal. 3. List all plants you can find which grow over 100 ft. tall. 4. Compare life today to a million years ago. 5. Create a poem which tells the concepts of the story. 6. Decide in an editorial the best benefits of this transformation.	1. Find the sentence that tells from where coal originates. 2. What comes from dead vegetation? 3. Make a time-line to show the transformation from plants to coal. 4. Cloze and create a poem which tells the concepts of the story. 5. Decide in a written paragraph if making coal can be made efficiently by man. Why-why not?	1. What comes from dead vegetation? 2. Identify the sentence which tells you that the dead material was covered. 3. What would be another title for the story?	1. What comes from dead vegetation? 2. Illustrate through a timeline the transformation of plants to coal. 3. Design your own dinosaur.	1. What comes from dead vegetation? 2. Compare life today with life a million years ago. 3. Decide an editorial best this transformation.

FIGURE ONE

There is another point to be made concerning comprehension. Not all comprehension excercises need to be question-written answer type tasks. One will note that several activities involve hands on type of projects which demonstrate higher Level III skills.

In the final analysis, if understanding is your aim, then comprehension's the name of the game.

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